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SENSITIVE  
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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [CB](#)  
SUBJECT: 30 YEARS AFTER THE KHMER ROUGE: MUCH TO CELEBRATE,  
BUT OPPORTUNITIES LOST

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

11. (SBU) Summary and Comment: The commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the January 7 "fall of the Khmer Rouge" marks a milestone in Cambodia's progress towards peace, stability, and development. However, the event was also a lost opportunity to put past divisions behind and embrace all elements of Cambodian society, including those with differing political ideologies, to share in the nation's remarkable achievements and to call for accountability for those responsible for the atrocities. Rather, this historic event was marred by political polarization and officials co-mingling praise for the RGC with claims that it is exclusively the CPP which has delivered Cambodia to its current state of peace and prosperity. End Summary and Comment.

12. (SBU) Forty to eighty thousand onlookers packed the Olympic Stadium for a three-hour ceremony commemorating January 7, 1979, the day when Vietnamese and Cambodian soldiers entered Phnom Penh, leading to the eventual "fall" of the four-year, brutal Khmer Rouge regime. An array of students, officials, diplomats, and average citizens watched as speeches were delivered, floats and bands marched by, and important sectors of society, including workers and minorities, demonstrated their support for the country's laudable achievements, in a carefully choreographed "patriotic ceremony."

13. (SBU) However, while stressing the national nature of January 7th and highlighting the significant progress the nation has achieved, especially in developing the economy and reducing poverty, Senate President Chea Sim (who is also the President of the CPP) attributed the success achieved thus far to the "correct direction and ...wise leadership of the CPP." In his remarks, he also emphasized the importance of national reconciliation, democracy and pluralism, equitable distribution of the benefits of recent economic prosperity, good governance and combating corruption, and respect for human rights. But, the generally commendable thrust of the speech was marred by the concluding paragraphs' focus solely on the CPP.

14. (SBU) In the days leading up to the ceremony, opposition party members and civil society representatives were critical of the emphasis on the CPP, rather than the government or the nation as a whole. Some people criticized the perceived "forced" participation in the ceremony of thousands of impressionable Cambodian students and the "hijacking" of the event by the CPP. Others argued January 7 marked the beginning of a decade-long Vietnamese occupation and that only with the October 23, 1991 signing of the Paris Peace Accords did Cambodia truly turn the page on the tumultuous chapter in its history. (Note: Cambodia commemorated the signing of the Paris Peace Accords as a national holiday up to 2005, when Prime Minister Hun Sen declared it would no longer be observed as a national holiday. End. Note.)

¶5. (SBU) CPP members were quick to brand critics as "non-patriotic" and "outsiders" who were not present in Cambodia to suffer under the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge regime. On Jan 6, Prime Minister Hun Sen lashed out at critics of the event during a speech when he branded them as "animals." During the same speech, he issued a fiery rebuke that Hun Sen and only Hun Sen is the father of Jan 7 and called any one who claims otherwise to be a "king liar." He was reacting to former PM Pen Sovan's earlier claim taking credit for the ousting of the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh. According to the government spokesman, only CPP funds were spent on the ceremony. However, local press report that school teachers were asked, some report pressured, to donate contributions to the CPP to help support the event.

¶6. (SBU) The 30th anniversary of the displacement of the Khmer Rouge from Phnom Penh has also been linked to the status of the Khmer Rouge Tribunal (KRT). Recently KRT Co-Prosecutors released public statements explaining their differences of opinion on the question of whether there should be additional submissions. Some people used this opportunity to raise questions yet again about accountability for the Khmer Rouge atrocities, pointing out how crucial this is to full closure for Cambodians. During his forty-minute speech, Chea Sim made no mention of the need to hold accountable those responsible for the horrors committed under the Khmer Rouge regime, to deliver much-delayed justice to the Cambodian people.  
CAMPBELL